



Engaging the “forgotten half”: Civic engagement among youth not on campuses

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Summary

A large gap in research exists about the engagement of youth not in school and with no college experience. This group is consistently less likely to be engaged or have opportunities to do so. CIRCLE will present quantitative and qualitative research into the half of the youth (ages 18-29) population that fits into this group.

As Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995) argue, widespread civic participation is the core of creating and sustaining a true democracy. However, data show that young people without college experience consistently demonstrate lower rates of civic engagement than their college-attending counterparts. More problematic is the recent research showing that youth in less affluent schools (where few youth are on a college track) are exposed to fewer of these opportunities to learn civic habits and skills (Kahne & Middaugh 2008; Kahne & Spote, 2008). Thus, “non-college” young people are underrepresented in groups, meetings, and elections.

Increasing the stakes, college experience is strongly associated with several demographic characteristics. Young people without college experience are more likely than those with college experience to be Latino or African American, male, and unemployed (Kiesa & Marcelo, 2009). Although many factors influence whether an individual will attend college, family income directly relates to college attendance, both two-year and four-year (Akerhielm, Berger, Hooker, & Wise, 1998; Aughinbaugh, 2008).

This session will provide an opportunity to discuss:

1. A comprehensive literature review on the topic
2. Analysis of population and civic data to show national trends
3. Focus group discussions with youth in four cities
4. Assessment of the civic impact of YouthBuild* on alumni of the program

* “In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16 to 24 work full-time for 6 to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their communities” (*YouthBuild USA*).

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